

[IMAGE]

The Health Benefits of Massage

Many chiropractors recommend massage in combination with chiropractic adjustments as part of an overall treatment strategy. What can a massage do for you? According to a recent study, it can do more than just ease away your stress; it can also have a positive impact on your blood pressure, heart and respiration.

An intriguing study out of Umea University, in Sweden, evaluated the physiological effects of touch massage and was published in the journal, *Autonomic Neuroscience: Basic and Clinical*.

The study evaluated the physiological effects of touch massage on stress responses in 22 healthy volunteers using a battery of bio-markers to identify autonomic nervous system responses.

Participants received touch massage on their hands and feet, which "consisted of stroking movements on the ventral and dorsal side of hands and feet along with circular movements on each finger and toe. Touch massage was performed for 80 min in the following order: 20 min each on the left hand, the right hand, the right foot, and the left foot." Participants in the control group rested in the same setting. Outcomes measures included heart rate and heart rate variability (the variation in time between heart beats), cortisol stress hormone levels from saliva, blood glucose, and serum insulin. Data were collected before, during, and after touch massage or rest session.

The main finding in this study was, "After 5 minutes of touch massage there was a significant decrease in heart rate lasting for 65 min, indicating reduced stress response." Though findings suggested significant changes across several measures, "the only significant differences between the groups were the decreases in heart rate after 45 minutes and in the HF component [high frequency domain of heart rate variability] after 5 minutes." Group differences between treatment and control groups are typically the focus of studies such as this one, because these differences measure the effect resulting from the treatment. Though there were no significant differences between groups in levels of cortisol, glucose, and insulin, "Saliva cortisol and insulin levels decreased significantly after intervention, while the serum glucose level remained stable. A similar pattern, although less prominent was observed in the control group." The findings from this study suggest, "Touch massage reduces the heart rate by decreasing sympathetic nervous activity and evoking a compensatory decreased parasympathetic nervous activity in order to maintain autonomic balance." These findings suggest that after receiving touch massage the participants experienced a biological relaxation

response - producing the experience of stress reduction.

This study provides evidence that supports one of the most popular theories for explaining the relaxing effects of massage therapy. Next time you see your chiropractor, inquire about getting a massage to complement your chiropractic session.

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